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ABSTRACT

Between 1960 and 1975, demands for competent two-year college administrators led many universities to develop specialized leadership programs or to incorporate leadership development curricula into existing programs. The skills needed to maintain and improve a system, however, are not necessarily the same as those that were required to establish it. Moreover, changes in the community college student body, technological expansion, and new demands from the labor force are changing the role of community college leaders. Graduate and continuing education programs for college leaders, therefore, should adjust their aims in order to respond to the changing environment. In these programs it is the faculty who are responsible for shaping and training new leaders. These faculty should consider incorporating the following principles into their graduate programs: understanding organizations as cultures, recognizing the importance of multiculturalism, embracing democratic practices, understanding the difference between compliance and empowerment, and creating opportunities for underrepresented graduate students. Efforts to strengthen the writing and analytic abilities of future administrators are also essential. Finally, in addition to these university-based programs, professional associations have taken on the role of continuing education for college leaders, providing programs that seek to strengthen interpersonal and technical competencies and focus on such current issues as administrative ethics, sexual harassment, collective bargaining, and conflict resolution. (HAA)

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Digest

May 1997 EDO-JC-97-07

Graduate and Continuing Education for Community College Leaders

by Tiffany G. O'Rourke

The role of the community college leader is currently changing because of a reduction in available funds, the diversification of the student population, continual increases in student enrollment, rapid technological expansion, and demands for new skills. A reflective analysis of current graduate and continuing education for community college leaders can inform graduate programs and prompt them to provide community college administrators with the knowledge and skills necessary to tackle today's leadership responsibilities. This digest will identify how the present-day environment challenges community college leaders, and discuss current perspectives on how graduate and continuing education programs for community college leaders might adjust their aims in order to respond to the current environment.

Historical Perspective

Between 1960 and 1975 the expansion of community colleges demanded a corps of administrators with perspectives and skills different from those of university administrators. The demand for administrative leaders who could cope with the difficulties associated with physical growth, broadened functions, and an increasingly heterogeneous student population at community colleges, exceeded the capability of the system to generate new leaders. In response, with assistance from philanthropic foundations, many universities developed specialized leadership programs or incorporated community college leadership development curricula into their existing higher education programs. These programs have produced most of the authorities and leaders in the field today.

In the 1990s, the demand for two-year college leaders has slowed and the qualifications sought by institutions are of a different nature. The administrative skills needed to maintain and improve a system are not necessarily the same as those which were required to establish it. Says Young, "In view of today's needs, the challenge of providing administrative leadership for two-year colleges exists in a vastly different social milieu than that of the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s" (p. 13). Therefore, Young contends that the impact of the contemporary social milieu on community college leadership needs to be reflected in university-based graduate and continuing education programs for community college leaders.

Recognizing Diversity Among Institutions and Students

Not only has the social milieu in which community college leaders work changed since the 1950s, but the community colleges and their student populations have also changed--they have become more diversified. For example, varying geographic locations, demographics, governance structures, and institutional sizes create a multifaceted array of institutions each with its own culture and unique population of students (Katsinas). Also, the increase in the number of non-traditional students enrolled at community colleges adds to the heterogeneity of community college institutional cultures. This diversity of institutional cultures creates a demand for leaders who can fill multiple roles and adapt to a variety of circumstances. "Students in graduate programs for community college leaders need to be exposed to the diversity in community college governance, finance, economic development, students, and curriculum issues; graduate programs need to emphasize diversity in community colleges rather than portray them in the aggregate" (Katsinas, p. 24).

The Role of the Professoriate

Since a doctorate in higher education is perceived "as a passport to senior administrative positions in the community college" (Townsend, p. 59), the faculty in higher education graduate programs are responsible for helping to shape and train the next generation of community college leaders. Hence, professors of community college leadership programs are what Townsend calls, the gatekeepers; they control who is admitted, and what is taught, and consequently influence the perceptions of students aspiring to become community college leaders.

Gibson-Benninger, Ratcliff, and Rhoades suggest that faculty preparing graduate students for positions in community colleges should consider developing future leaders who possess a democratic vision of leadership, one in which "leaders are capable of working with diverse constituents and are able to understand the complex and

multiple meanings prevalent in today's community colleges" (p. 74). They propose incorporating the following principles into the structure of community college graduate programs:

1. Understand organizations as cultures;
2. Recognize the importance of multiculturalism;
3. Embrace democratic practices across graduate programs;
4. Understand the difference between compliance and empowerment;
5. Create opportunities for underrepresented graduate students (pp. 72-73).

Similarly, Hankin stresses that those in leadership positions must work collectively to cover as many areas of knowledge and experience as possible. Graduate and continuing education programs for community college leaders can help facilitate the vision expressed by Hankin and Gibson-Benninger, Ratcliff, and Rhoades by teaching participants how to recognize the talents of others and the importance of democratic practices.

Curricular efforts to strengthen the writing and analytic abilities of future administrators are also essential. Leaders are expected to be thinkers. To develop a student's thinking, Vaughan and Scott advise graduate programs to require students to apply theory and engage in problem-solving through writing. Future community college leaders must be able to write clearly, present their thoughts logically, and follow the accepted rules of grammar. According to Vaughan and Scott, "effective writing is the skill that future community college leaders are likely to need and use more than any other" (p. 28).

Continuing Education

Since standard higher education courses do not often explore current issues such as administrative ethics, sexual harassment, collective bargaining, or conflict resolution, professional associations have taken on the role of continuing education for community college leaders through programs ranging from short-term workshops to yearlong internships. These association-sponsored programs have assumed the responsibility for strengthening interpersonal and technical competencies of community college leaders, helping to develop their career strategies for advancement, and exposing leaders to broader debate about current issues that may affect them (Vigil Laden). They have also undertaken efforts to improve the advancement opportunities for minorities and women administrators.

Professional associations are complementary to university training. By broadening the theoretical knowledge gained in graduate school, professional associations provide understanding in the daily operational problems of administrative life. Considering their importance in the continuing development of future community college leaders, graduate and continuing education programs might consider strengthening their relationships with professional associations.

Conclusion: Implications for the Future

There is no shortage in the number of doctorates in higher education. What is missing is a common agreement about the competencies such a degree should imply for a prospective community college leader. Palmer raises the question, "Is it the mastery of job skills or the development of general intellectual skills applicable to a wide range of situations?" Stressing administrative competencies rather than intellectual inquiry is likely to make it more difficult, rather than easier, for the next generation of community college leaders to navigate through the changing economic, social, technological and demographic climates. Palmer points out that the contemporary climate requires leaders who are not only able to carry out day-to-day college operations effectively, but who are also able to critically analyze, define, and communicate the educational purpose of their institutions. Ultimately, the vitality and utility of graduate and continuing education programs for community college leaders depends on an ongoing dialogue about how to educate and train effective and successful community college leaders.

References

This Digest is drawn from New Directions for Community Colleges, Number 95, edited by James C. Palmer and Stephen G. Katsinas, published in Fall, 1996: "Graduate and Continuing Education for Community College Leaders: What It Means Today." The cited articles include: "Legacy of the Post-WWII Growth Years for Community College Leadership Programs," by Raymond Young; "Preparing Leaders for Diverse Institutional Settings," by Stephen Katsinas; "Educating Future Community College Leaders as Skilled Writers: Focusing the Debate," by George Vaughan and Barbara Scott; "The Door That Never Closes: Continuing Education Needs of Community College Leaders," by Joseph Hankin; "The Role of Professional Associations in Developing Academic and Administrative Leaders," by Berta Vigil Laden; "The Role of the Professoriate in Influencing Future Community College Leadership," by Barbara Townsend; "Diversity, Discourse, and Democracy: Needed Attributes in the Next Generation of Community College Leadership Programs" by Barbara Gibson-Benninger, James Ratcliff, and Robert Rhoads; and "The Transactional Relationship Between University Professors and Community College Leaders," by James Palmer.

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